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ABSTRACT

Metaphorically, the head and the heart represent different decision-making strategies. The disjunction between these two cultures is both sharp and unnecessary. The conflict between rationality and emotion is much broader than the tension between critical thinking and values analysis, but the assumptions responsible for the mutual awkwardness of the processes are almost identical. Critical thinking and values analysis must be joined for either to provide the guidance to decision-making that aficionados of each have promised. There are several manifestations, including critical thinking and social science texts, educational assumptions, and pejorative references to emotion, that show: (1) the conflict between reliance on critical thinking or values analysis as guides for intelligent description-making; and (2) the depth of the disagreement between partisans of the affective and cognitive domains. Teaching students a healthy respect for critical thinking and values analysis can help them make use of a more complete version of their analytical abilities and demonstrate to them the efficacy of both critical thinking and values analysis. (Fourteen notes are included.) (MS)

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THE POTENTIAL UNITY OF CRITICAL THINKING AND VALUES ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Metaphorically, the head and the heart represent different decision-making strategies. The disjunction between these two cultures is both sharp and unnecessary. The conflict between rationality and emotion is much broader than the tension between critical thinking and values analysis, but the assumptions responsible for the mutual awkwardness of the processes are almost identical.

The first section of this paper attempts to depict several manifestations of the conflict between reliance on critical thinking or values analysis as guides for intelligent decision-making. The purpose of this section is to highlight the depth of the disagreement between partisans of the affective and cognitive domains.

The second section describes one technique for merging the skills and attitudes that constitute critical thinking and values analysis. The objective of the unification is to take advantage of the synergistic effects from their joint usage.

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"Why didn't you walk around the hole?" asked the Tin Woodman.

"I didn't know enough," replied the Scarecrow, cheerfully. "My head is stuffed with straw, you know, and that is why I am going to Oz to ask him for some brains."

"Oh, I see;" said the Tin Woodman. "But, after all, brains are not the best things in the world."

"Have you any?" enquired the Scarecrow.

"No, my head is quite empty," answered the Woodman; "but once I had brains, and a heart also; so having tried them both, I should much rather have a heart."

"All the same," said the Scarecrow, "I shall ask for brains instead of a heart; for a fool would not know what to do with a heart if he had one."

"I shall take the heart," returned the Tin Woodman; "for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world."

L. Frank Baum
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

Language which devotes its attention to truth ought to be plain and unadorned.

Seneca
Letter 40
Letters to Lucilius

Those whose classrooms focus on critical thinking can be expected to discourage extended discussions about value preferences. Symmetrically, teachers fascinated by ethical applications rarely trust the seemingly rigid reliance on rationality encouraged by critical thinking exercises. Consequently two important concerns are approached in a disjointed fashion. Critical thinking is pushed by the Scarecrow's partisans; values analysis is urged by the Tin Woodman's sympathizers.

At first glance such a dichotomy appears overdrawn. The first section of this paper attempts to portray the struggle between the forces of the head and the heart as real and significant. The subsequent section suggests one avenue by which critical thinking and value analysis can be merged. In fact, the major thesis of this paper is that they must be joined for either to provide the guidance to decision-making that aficionados of each have promised.

I. Manifestations of the Conflict between Head and Heart

A certain metaphorical looseness is required to identify critical thinking with all cognitive activities subsumed in references to the head. Similar license is necessary to use values analysis as the totality of the emotional domain encapsuled by mention of the heart. My justification for each usage is the representativeness of the alleged mismatch between critical thinking and values analysis; the tension between those

two classroom objectives is shaped by the same assumptions separating the two cultures of the head and the heart.

To demonstrate this tension$, I will briefly discuss several illustrations of the apparent conflict between critical thinking and values analysis. In each case, there is either active hostility or studied indifference separating those who represent the affective and cognitive domains.

A. Critical Thinking Texts

An obvious place to start looking for such illustrations is in critical thinking textbooks. Critical thinking is so much in vogue at this minute that virtually no curricular modification can advance unless it ceremoriously genuflects in the direction of enhanced critical thinking.[1] Numerous texts have been written to take advantage of this contemporary bandwagon. National and international conferences are held to share new theoretical and pedagogical approaches to critical thinking.

Noticeably absent from these textbooks is a well developed treatment of the role of values in effective reasoning. Why? A partial answer is found in the academic tradition that stimulates these texts. Seneca's comment in the preface to this paper reflects the belief of most academics. Emotion, drama, metaphor, and value judgments should be distrusted; they are the tools of clever sophists whose substance is skimpy. If one has reasonable and valid things to say, (it is assumed by most textbook authors) your formulation will be victorious in the marketplace of ideas. Consequently, inclusion of chapters about values in a critical thinking text would ordinarily be

anomalous. The only exception would be sections explaining the dangers of emotion or passion for prospective critical thinkers.

B. Social Science Texts

Introductory social science textbooks ritualistically contain statements about normative methodology in their respective disciplines. Those statements are generally consistent with a simplistic and anachronistic positivism.[2] Students are told that the study they are about to undertake is one that is value-free. That characterization is provided to convince learners that they are going to encounter truths, untouched by the distorting impact of values. Values in this approach are used synonymously with prejudices or biases; when present, they are to be repressed as dysfunctional for sound reasoning.

This distinction between the fruits of reason and values results in invidious comparisons between "hard" and "soft" thinking. The extent to which one is soft in his or her thinking is evidence of an intellect squishy in its performance. To make value judgments in the social sciences is seen by proponents of orthodox social science methodology as entering the realm of the moralist, religious leader, or even more disparagingly, the dilettante.

C. Educational Assumptions

In any conflict between the affective and cognitive domains, most of us in the community of teachers know where we stand. Most of our behavior and educational philosophy is consistent

with Mr. Gradgrind's portrayal of optimal education in Dickens' Hard Times:

> Now what I want is Facts. Teach those boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else and root out everything else... Stick to Facts, sir![3]

Facts are, of course one of the starting points for critical thinking, although their transmission often gets in the way of critical thinking.[4] Because faculty claim that they see improved critical thinking as their most important objective,[5] it is predictable that they would shy away from the putative subjectivity of moral discourse.

Despite the fact that very little critical thinking is encouraged in typical classrooms (even at elite postsecondary institutions[6]), faculty commitment to discovering truth rather than ethical behavior reigns supreme. Academics are embarrassed to designate correct or proper behavior. Who are we, after all, to presume ethical expertise? From this emphasis on cognitive processes, we naturally enough produce graduates who can relate a few facts and point out a very few errors in reasoning.[7] What we fail to do is provide encouragement to form commitments.[8] For what can a student be expected to live or die when she has not had practice in values analysis?

D. Pejorative References to Emotion

To discuss and evaluate values is to somehow move, in the minds of those who ignore such behavior, from reason to

emotion. Such a movement gives values analysis a negative connotation. We know that the connotation is negative because to be emotional is regarded as a criticism. So reflexive is our contempt and ridicule for emotion that many have hastily branded an entire gender with the denunciation that "You're just being emotional." The riposte is frequently a denial of the accusation, accompanied by specific evidence of rationality.[9] Imagine the shock were the rejoinder to be instead, "Yes and you should try some reasoned passion yourself."[10]

II. Merging Critical Thinking and Values Analysis

This conflict between critical thinking and values analysis as teaching objectives exists during a period when leaders as diverse as the Secretary of Education and Governor Cuomo are calling for renewed effort in the schools to teach moral reasoning. We are experiencing either a deluge of moral indiscretions (to say the least) or a dramatic surge in the techniques of investigatory journalism. We have recently witnessed over a dozen admitted insider trading violations, a major television evangelist who used his position to extort sexual favors, more indictments of Presidential staff and appointees than were handed down in any previous administration, and the termination of two Presidential candidacies subsequent to damning moral disclosures.

Would these events have transpired had the personalities involved been either better critical thinkers OR values

analysts? The answer is "probably." Neither set of skills and attitudes is, by itself, an antidote to thoughtful, moral decisions. A clever person can probably use reason to support whatever decision he or she wishes to make.[11] A person with articulated and reasoned value priorities would have required critical thinking skills to select from among those values that all of us possess.[12] Otherwise the task of making value assumptions would be willy-nilly.

Both critical thinking and values analysis are necessary for productive reflection. Neither is preeminent. What unifies all critical thinking approaches is the emphasis on evaluation of reasoning. Much reasoning is premised on value priorities.[13] Failure to identify and evaluate those priorities renders productive conversation useless.[14] Not only is it alienating to criticize our moral principles as emotional baggage, it is also destructive of careful thought.

Value priorities push reasoning in particular directions. Weighing facts and forming inferences is frequently activated by value priorities. In addition, at the point of decision, after alternative arguments have been assessed, value assumptions may provide the glue that makes a particular conclusion fit the reasons that survived the evaluative process.

The choice of and rationale for value assumptions requires the traditional skills of critical thinking. Why is a particular value priority appropriate in a specific context? Are the alleged consequences of heeding the dictates of various value assumptions spelled out accurately and fairly? The same

critical questions that constitute the basis for critical thinking are necessary components for the choice and evaluation of value assumptions.

By teaching our students a healthy respect for critical thinking and values analysis, we teach them to make use of a more complete version of their analytical abilities. We should not be providing them with a choice between the head and the heart. Instead we owe it to them to demonstrate the efficacy of both critical thinking and values analysis.

Notes

[1]Arnold B. Arons, "'Critical Thinking' and the Baccalaureate Curriculum," 71 Liberal Education 141 (1985).

[2]For a discussion of modern criticisms of positivism, see, inter alia, M. Neil Browne, "The Metaphorical Constraints to Pay Equity," 6 Population Research and Policy Review 29 (1987); Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University, 1979); Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).

[3]Charles Dickens, Hard Times (London: Oxford University, 1955) p. 1.

[4]See, Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Seabury Press, 1970) for a critique of the banking metaphor of teaching wherein the teacher makes deposits of facts and then expects to draw out the same facts on command.

[5]Ernest L. Boyer, College: The Undergraduate Experience in America (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

[6]John Braxton and Robert C. Nordvall, "Selective Liberal Arts Colleges: Higher Quality As Well As Higher Prestige?" 56 Journal of Higher Education 538 (1985).

[7]Stuart M. Keeley and M. Neil Browne, "How College Seniors Operationalize Critical Thinking Behavior," 20 College Student Journal 389 (1986).

[8]William G. Perry, Jr., Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970).

[9]David Ehrenfeld, The Arrogance of Humanism (New York, Harper and Row, 1978), p. 143.

[10]Barbara W. Tuchman, "A Nation in Decline?" New York Times Magazine 53 (September 20, 1987). Ms. Tuchman points out that anger when anger is due is necessary for self-respect.

[11]Ehrenfeld, op. cit., p. 146.

[12]Milton Rokeach, The Nature of Human Values (New York: Free Press, 1973) p. 3.

[13]M. Neil Browne and Stuart M. Keeley, Asking the Right Questions (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1986, 2nd edition).

[14]Robert Fogelin, "The Logic of Deep Disagreements," 7 Informal Logic 1 (1985).